

SAVAGE Pacer



Town square parking lot evolving

By Nancy Huddleston, EDITOR, Savage Pacer, July 23, 2005

Plans to improve the town square parking lot are moving forward, but there are still a few kinks to work out.

The first kink involves Highway 13, which is the northern border of the old Dan Patch lounge parking lot. The gravel lot sits between Ottawa and Princeton avenues and has been slated for a variety of improvements. Although it will remain a parking lot, the city is planning to set aside a corner of the lot for the old Savage Depot. What's more, the Savage City Council wants to dress up the lot to make it more inviting from the highway and to create an oasis in the downtown area.

WSB and Associates is working on the project and presented plans on July 11. But the city council wasn't pleased, saying the concept plan presented in May looked nicer.

"I'm a bit disappointed because I thought we were presented something with a visual impact and now it looks like we're expected to pay \$350,000 for a parking lot," said Councilman Craig Chamberlain.

He said he understands that things change from the concept to planning stages, but now there is a totally different feel to the project.

Councilwoman Janet Williams also was disappointed, saying the plan looked much different.

"There's a big difference between conceptual design and real design," explained City Administrator Barry Stock. "We can still get some of the landscaping in, but not all of it."

The council specifically didn't like the way a planting area was moved from the north side of the parking lot to the middle of the lot because they felt there is a need to isolate the parking lot from the highway

Dave Hutton of WSB and Associates said the options are limited, but suggested the council could give up some parking spots to get more green space.

In terms of the northern boundary with the highway, the options are limited, Hutton explained. The retaining wall planned in that area is right up against the right of way for the highway. What's more, creating the retaining wall will change how runoff drains from the lot to the other direction.

Another concern is the type of retaining wall, Hutton pointed out. The regular keystone block does not hold up well to salt spray from the road, so he suggested a pre-cast type that would be more

durable and more attractive. But it costs more - \$35 per foot as compared with \$25 per foot for keystone block.

Councilman Kevin Lienau suggested the city opt for the more expensive retaining wall and cited durability as his reason. He also suggested that the design for landscaping along that wall could include bump-out planters that would eliminate a few parking spots, but create room for trees and other landscaping, thus creating the barrier the city desires from the highway

Lienau also suggested leaving the wrought-iron fence along the top of the retaining wall because it provides an actual barrier.

"We're looking to try to separate Savage from Highway 13," he said. "We need to make a visual and physical distinction."

He also said the original concept plan fostered good feelings. "It was intimate, there were trees," he said. "I want to do this lot right. If it takes another couple of weeks, then let's do it. We've got to do it right."

Hutton said the plan could be modified to accommodate Lienau's suggestions.

But another issue is how to deal with the intersections of Ottawa and Princeton avenues at Highway 13. WSB's plan calls for modifying those intersections by closing off leftturn access on and off Highway 13. This change would help the city in its quest to get a new signal at Quentin Avenue.

But Chamberlain and Williams were leery of that idea, saying the city has no guarantee from the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) that it will allow a signalized intersection at Quentin Avenue.

Hutton said the city talked with the two businesses that would be most impacted by changes at Ottawa and Princeton – El Loro Mexican Restaurant and Motor Mart. Representatives from El Loro said they want more parking on Ottawa and do not want to lose the Ottawa access. Motor Mart representatives didn't have a lot of concern about any access changes at Princeton; rather, they wanted to preserve room for gasoline tankers to get in and out without a lot of hassle.

Hutton said any changes to the Ottawa and Princeton intersections should be done in conjunction with improvements at the Quentin intersection if a signal is installed. The problem is that project does not have funding from MnDOT.

Hutton and Stock will continue to meet with MnDOT about the access points to downtown Savage along Highway 13 and report back. But Hutton warned waiting for MnDOT improvements may cause a delay in improvements to the parking lot.

Mayor Tom Brennan didn't think that was an issue, saying the city is trying to correct a problem in the area anyway. Stock noted that leaving access open to Highway 13 at Ottawa and Princeton will give the city leverage to get funding for the Quentin Avenue signal project.

Councilman Al McColl said he sees the quest to make improvements to downtown Savage along Highway 13 as a phased project. "The parking lot is one phase; the highway is another," he said. "We just need to get it started."

Hutton will report back to the city council in August about the changes to the concept plan and on discussions with MnDOT on the highway access points.

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